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## THE WHITE INDENTED SERVANTS OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

By Theo. D. Jervey.

In the recent work of Mr. A. Maurice Low, entitled "The American People," there occurs, at pages 323 and 324, the assertion: "In Virginia and Maryland, great as the evils of slavery were in degrading free white labor, there was still room for the white indentured servant, but in South Carolina that was impossible."<sup>1</sup>

Without considering the first portion of the above statement, it is proposed to subject to examination the last, which would be generally understood to mean that "the white indentured servant," in South Carolina, "was impossible."

In the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina of 1669 "absolute power" was "given to all freemen over their slaves"<sup>2</sup> and although we find by the joint letter of the Proprietors Ashley, Carteret and Colleton to Sir John Yeamans in the year of the first settlement of the Province, 1670, an inclusion of negroes under the head of servants,<sup>3</sup> yet a distinction was quickly established between the two, as appears by the act of 1686, which indicates that there were

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<sup>1</sup>The American People.—A. Maurice Low, pages 323-324, (Boston, 1909).

<sup>2</sup>The Shaftesbury Papers, page 115.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, page 164.

in the Province at that date a sufficient number of white indented servants to warrant the passage of an act for their better government. This act after declaring: "Forasmuch as there hath been of late several indirect bargains between freemen servants and slaves amongst themselves whereby some evilly disposed have adventured privately to embezzle waste and sell divers of their masters goods," provided by way of punishment for such offenders, "if servants, to serve one whole year more of their contracted tyme;" and by further provisions, for every day lost by any absconding white servant, such a one was compelled to serve twenty-eight days additional to his contracted time.<sup>4</sup>

In the year immediately following this, 1687, provision was made: "For the avoiding of all fraud or any other difference that may happen between masters and servants when servants doe arrive in this Province without Indentures or other contracts."<sup>5</sup>

By this act it became the duty of the Grand Council to investigate such cases, fix a limit, and "upon the expiration of their terme of service lymited as aforesaid," it was provided that these servants should receive from their respective masters—"one suit of Apparell, one barrel of Indian Corne, one Axe and one Hoe."

Four years later, in 1691, it was enacted "on complaint made good by proof that any master mistress or overseer shall under pretext of correction whipp or unreasonably abuse his her or their servant or servants \* \* \* it shall be lawfull for the Grand Council to sett such servant or servants at liberty."<sup>6</sup>

These enactments seem to establish beyond doubt the presence of white indented servants in the Province in sufficient numbers to warrant legislation concerning them; but in the next decade occur two statutes that throw an even fuller light upon the number therein.

By the first of these, in the year 1698, entitled "An act for the Encouragement of the Importation of White Servants," it was provided that "every merchant owner or

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<sup>4</sup>Statutes of South Carolina, Vol III, page 22.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, Vol. III, page 30.

<sup>6</sup>Stat. S. C., Vol. II, page 53.

master of any ship or vessell or any person not intending to settle and plant here which shall bring any white male servant Irish only excepted into Ashley river, over sixteen years of age and under forty and the same shall deliver to the Receiver General shall receive and be paid by the said Receiver in dollars or pieces of eight at five shillings the piece, the sum of thirteen pounds \* \* \* Provided that every servant as aforesaid hath not less than four years to serve from and after the day of his arrival." This act after protecting the servant in his time if service further provided that "every owner of every plantation to which doth belong six men negro slaves above sixteen years old shall take from the Receiver one servant when it shall be his lot to have one and shall within three months pay the said Receiver so much money for the said servant as the Receiver gave to the person from whom he received the same"<sup>7</sup> etc.

By the second of the two statutes above alluded to, enacted in 1700, the first, enacted in 1698 was repealed and upon the express ground that its purpose had been effected. The language of the repealing act is as follows: "Whereas by an Act made and ratified the 8th day of October 1698 entitled an Act for the Encouragement of the Importation of White Servants, it was (amongst other things) enacted that by reason of the great number of negroes imported into this Collony every owner of every plantation having six negro men slaves shall be furnished and supplied with a white servant—as by the said Act is required, which is already accomplished. Be it therefore enacted \* \* \* that the said Act \* \* \* be repealed."<sup>8</sup>

Now as the report of Governor Sir Nathaniel Johnson in 1708 states the number of Whites and Negroes in the Province to be about equal, namely 4,080 whites to 4,100 negroes and of the whites only 120 servants,<sup>9</sup> it is a fair and reasonable inference that a very substantial portion of this number of 4,080 whites consisted of indentured servants whose time had expired and who thus became freemen.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, page 153.

<sup>8</sup>Stat. S. C., Vol 11, page 165.

<sup>9</sup>South Carolina Under the Proprietary Govt.—McCrary, p. 477.

Unfortunately from 1708 to 1715 the importation of negroes again greatly increased and the historian Hildreth's estimate that the proportion of whites and negroes at the latter date in the Province was 6,250 to 10,200 is very possibly correct; for there were many reasons to conduce to such a result. The planters desired the slave labor and doubtless found it, for their purposes more suitable than white labor and locally they were the controlling class. The British Government favored the importation of it on account of the interest in the slave trade of the mercantile classes of Great Britain; and while "the golden days of Newport," Rhode Island's sea port, can scarcely be said to have arrived until 1739—"By 1700, however, Rhode Island had begun to perceive where lay the path to fortune,"<sup>10</sup> viz: in the "genteel" slave trade.

On the other hand, by 1714, in South Carolina, the provincial legislature was sufficiently alive to the injury to affix a duty of two pounds\* upon every negro slave imported, by an act the preamble of which states: "Whereas the number of Negroes do extremely increase in this Province and through the afflicting Providence of God the white persons do not proportionately multiply, by reason of which the safety of the said Province is greatly endangered"<sup>11</sup>; while by 1717 through raising the duty from two to \*forty pounds,<sup>12</sup> the importation was made almost prohibitive. Two years prior to the first act, viz, in 1712, there had been offered "fourteen pounds for the importation of every healthy male British servant betwixt the ages of twelve and thirty years,"<sup>13</sup> which bounty in its turn, in 1716, had been raised to twenty-five pounds, with a proviso, however, strikingly illustrative of the British prejudice of the Province, viz, "That none of the servants be either what is commonly called native Irish, or persons of known scandalous character, or Roman Catholics."<sup>†</sup> By this act one such

<sup>10</sup>Rhode Island.—Richman, pages 112-113.

<sup>11</sup>Stat. S. C., Vol. VII, page 367.

\*Pounds currency, then about 1/7 of Sterling.—Ed.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., page 370.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Vol. 11, page 385.

†The Roman Catholic Religion was not then tolerated in the Province.—Ed.

white servant was forced upon all plantations or persons, "to whom shall belong ten slaves young or old."<sup>14</sup> That in spite of the apparent necessity for this last act, there must have been in the Province in 1716 quite a number of white indentured servants is indicated by another act of that year which recites that £960 was paid Mr. Samuel Deane for thirty-two white servants bought by the Honorable the Government to be employed as soldiers in defending this Province against our enemies";<sup>15</sup> for if Mr. Deane had thirty-two to sell it seems scarcely probable that he alone should have been possessed of such.

Yet even if this extremely improbable condition is assumed, it did not continue long; for by 1717, when again an act was passed providing that each such servant should "serve according to his contract or indenture," the mode by which such should procure "a certificate of their freedom, on demand," and the penalty for its refusal, the preamble distinctly states: "Whereas there has of late arrived in this Province great numbers of White Servants,"<sup>16</sup> etc. And that from this time up to and through 1744, there must have been quite a number of them still there, is established by the acts relating to "the better governing and regulating White Servants."<sup>17</sup>

So far then from "room" being "impossible" for white indentured servants in South Carolina, the evidence is overwhelming that they were there from the settlement for at least three-quarters of a century and if this is a sample of the thoroughness with which Mr. Low has utilized the nine years which he is credited with having spent in the preparation of his work, the reader may well be sceptical concerning many other assertions found therein.

But considering now the general sentiment with regard to these white indentured servants, we would contrast it with that felt for negroes. We have seen that under Locke's Fundamental constitutions of Carolina, "absolute power was given all freemen over their negro slaves;" which was

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, Vol. 11, page 646.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, Vol. II, page 682.

<sup>16</sup>Statutes S. C., Vol. III, page 14.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, page 621.

broadened by the act of 1686, which permitted or directed *any one* apprehending a runaway negro or indian slave, to chastise the same and send him home, while no such power was given in the case of white servants, and by the act of 1691, provision was made for the enfranchisement of such, if "whipped or unreasonably abused." Yet this did not mean that corporal punishment was prohibited with regard to white servants; but only that it was reserved for the higher powers to administer same, as by reference to the Council Journals of an early date, we find this entry on June 2d 1672: "Upon consideration had of the complaynt this day brought in by Mrs. Affera Coming against her servants namely John Chambers, Phillip ONill and Michael Lovell for their disobedience to her in refusing to obey her lawful commands & more especially against the said Philip ONill for threatening to overset the Boate wherein she was or words to that effect and giving the provisions allowed him and his fellow servants to the Doggs and threatening to run away to the Indians and divers other gross abuses, which being sufficiently proved. It is ordered by the Grand Councill that the said Phillip O'Neill be forthwith tied to the tree and there receive one and twenty lashes upon his naked back and that the others be advised for time to come to render more dutifull obedience to the lawful commands of their said Mistress upon pain of condign punishment."<sup>18</sup>

It must be remembered that the powers of masters and mistresses over servants at this time were and continued to be for more than half a century such as now seem almost incredible. Nor do they seem to have been affected by the forms of government under which such dwelt as the following "extract of a letter from Mr. C. Purry in London to his friend in Charleston dated May 10th 1732" indicates: "Sir, My Father is in Switzerland where he has purchased a number of People and hath great hopes to get a great many Free Men besides Women and Children."<sup>19</sup> But the feeling with regard to this class of Bondsmen does not appear to have been harsh or even devoid of a certain de-

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<sup>18</sup>Shaftesbury Papers, page 394.

<sup>19</sup>Carolina Gazette, Sept. 16-23, 1732.

gree of sympathy, as the following local of about the same date as the above seems to show. "On the 29th past, a white servant man belonging to Mr. Robert Sinclair drowned himself in Black River, he had been in the Province but a few weeks and it is imagined that his being put to work, which was what it seems he had not been used to induced him not (to) dispatch himself. He was found next day floating on the River with half a Score Alligators about him that had made no Scruple of working upon the Poor Fellows Carcase pretty sufficiently."<sup>20</sup>

In concluding this brief examination of the condition of white indented labor in the Province of South Carolina, a consideration of the proportionate effort made by those embraced under such head, and portions of the population conditioned differently, to evade their obligations, may be not without instruction.

If the estimate of the historian Hildreth concerning the relative numbers of whites and negroes in the Province of South Carolina for 1715 is correct, that as well as the Report of Governor Robert Johnson for 1719 and the account of the number of negroes imported from 1706 to 1724 as reported by the Committee of the Commons House of Assembly of the Province of South Carolina for 1737, would intimate an increase in population from 1715 to 1720 of about 250 whites to 2,500 negroes making it 6,500 whites to nearly 20,000 negroes; but as the Report of the Board of Trade of 1721 puts the white population at 9,000 and the negro population only 12,000, it is apparent that wars, pestilence and famine had affected the growth, and although in the next three years the population increased 2,500 in the proportion of 4 to 1 in favor of the negroes, it is not an unreasonable deduction from all records available, that in 1731-32, the population must have been about two negroes to every white or 10,000 whites to 20,000 negroes. The proportion of whites which were or had been indented servants there seems to be no record of; but it could hardly have been as great as half, and at the most one fourth of the number of negro slaves. Now by an exami-

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid, July 8-15, 1732.



nation of the advertisements for runaways for the year 1731-32, there appear to have been of these 19 negroes, 6 white servants, 4 deserting soldiers, 2 sailors and 2 Indian slaves. A proportionately greater number of white servants therefore must have attempted to break their bonds than did negroes. It might be argued that the condition of bondage to a higher race, was more galling or that they could from their higher intelligence or lesser restraint the more easily escape; but what inference are we to draw, when we find that in the same period appear advertisements for three absconding wives? Of husbands in the position to advertise for such, there could hardly have been 2,000; so that it veritably looks as if the inclination of the white servants to avoid their obligations to their masters was less strong than that of their mistresses to avoid theirs, and we may not be far wrong in concluding, that upon the whole their lot could not have been that of peculiar hardship.

Addenda—The following additional references to white servitude are of some interest in connection with Mr. Jervey's paper.

1716, May 10, St. James. Letters of Lords Proprietors to Gov. Charles Craven, relating to the transportation of some rebels to South Carolina.

1716, June 11. Receipt for £20, signed Thomas Johnson, on account for the transportation of Mr. John Porteous.

1716, June 15, St. James. Letter from Lord Carteret to Col. Rhett, relating to the transportation of Mr. John Porteous (who was taken in the rebellion at Preston, in Lancashire) to the American plantations.—*Collections of the S. C. Hist. Soc.*, Vol. 1, pp. 164-165.

In the Charleston Probate Court, Book 1727-1729, page 253, is the following list of convicts, the only one which has so far come under our observation:

South Carolina.

John Mackenzie Master & Commander of the ship called Expedition lately arrived from Bristol and now riding in the harbour of Charlestowne in the Province of South Carolina Maketh Oath That he this deponent on or about the eleventh day of Dec<sup>r</sup>. last & on Several days since landed or cause to be landed & brought on Shore at this port the Several Convicts Mentioned in the Schedule hereunto annexed according to the Act of Parliement made in the Sixth Year of the Reign of his late Majesty King George the first in this case made & provided & in full Performanse of the Agreements by him entered into in great Brittain for this purpose.

John McKenzie.

W<sup>m</sup>. Birrell Mate of the said Ship maketh Oath that the Contents of the above affidavit is true from his own knowledge.

S<sup>o</sup> Carolina

Council Chambers 9<sup>th</sup>. Feby 1728.

Sworne before me

Ar: Middleton.

List of Convicts Imported from Bristol to the province of S<sup>o</sup>. Carolina on board the Ship called the Expedition John McKenzie was.

Edward Bond.....	Convicted 4 <sup>th</sup> . October 1726 Com. Wilts
	Felony 7 Years.
Mary Walter	{ .....Convicted 16 <sup>th</sup> . March 1727. Com Wilts
Henry Cooper	
Eliz: Ends	
Solomon Grar	
John Moore	{ .....Convicted 16 March 1727 Worcester
W <sup>m</sup> . Purnell Eod. Die.....	
John Dudson	{ .....Convicted 24 Aug <sup>st</sup> .....Worcester
Thos. Oliver	
W <sup>m</sup> . Thompson	{ .....Convicted 14 Sep <sup>t</sup> . 1728.....at Bristol
Tho <sup>s</sup> . Smith	
Mary Deeley	
Jane Lewis	
Mary Robertson	{ .....D <sup>o</sup> .....Felony 7 Years.
W <sup>m</sup> . Vaughn	
Sam: Foster	
Rob <sup>t</sup> . Kates	
W <sup>m</sup> . Fitchut	{ .....Convicted 22 <sup>d</sup> July 1728.....at Gloucester
W <sup>m</sup> . Richardson	
	Felony 7 Years.
John Evans	{ .....D <sup>o</sup> .....Felony 7 Years.
Joseph Ashton	
Ralph Phillips	{ .....D <sup>o</sup> .....Felony 7 Years.
Caleb Stowell	
Mary Hillier	